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# Taking Live Methods slowly: inhabiting the social world through dwelling, doodling, and describing

## Abstract

This article contributes to literatures on sociological Live Methods by advocating for ‘playing’ with the concept of slow methods. Slow methods include a reflexive disposition towards the unfolding of social life in ordinary spaces (dwelling), the use of drawing as an embodied tool for understanding this unfolding (doodling), and the combination of these approaches into writing which deliberately seeks to evoke the liveness of the social world (describing). It draws on an ethnography of a joint-use public-academic library and several scenes selected from its fieldwork. I make three arguments: firstly, I argue for analogue methods to compliment digitally focussed live methods. Secondly, I explore the value of slow methods for being *drawn into* a scene and *drawn to see* its micro-happenings, particularly in spaces where the social world unfolds in mundane and uneven ways. Thirdly, I argue the approach allows ‘shy researchers’ to engage attentively and reflexively in the field.

## Key words

Live methods, drawing, ethnography, slowness, art, reflexivity, shyness

## Introduction: Live methods and creative time

The popularity of creative qualitative methods for attending to everyday life has grown in recent years, alongside an allied interest in research reflexivity (Henwood, Dicks and Housley, 2019; Ayrton, 2020). In particular, ‘live methods’ and ‘live sociology’, as coined by Les Back and Nirmal Puwar, has been highly influential, representing a sociological *ethic* as much as a methodology. Introducing their ‘provocations’ in 2012, Back and Puwar call ‘Live methods’ ‘an idea that resonates differently’ with different contributors, yet coalesces around a commitment to ‘re-thinking sociological craft and forms of representation’, with emphasis often on the ‘craftiness’ of the term craft (2012: 6).

In keeping with the word ‘live’ and with the preoccupations this loose grouping of research has with textured temporalities, ‘lived time’ (Wajcman, 2008), rhythm (Lyon, 2019) and ‘temporal architectures’ (Harris and Coleman, 2020), Live Methods has a mobile focus, with an eye on sociology’s past and its – and society’s – potential future. On the one hand, the turn to Live can be read as a disciplining move, seeking ‘re’s – a re/newal, re/turn to experimentation, to complexity, to

ethics, to provocation and art in sociology. There is a sense of Live Methods seeking a re/clamation of something lost to the proliferation of ‘freelance fact makers’ (Back, 2012: 19) and those sociologists who – Back muses – perhaps preferred ‘a simpler time in which sociology knew what is was and also how to engage with the world’ (2014: n.p). The live ‘turn’ is complicated and sensorial, seeking the ‘sensitive nerve centres’ of everyday lives within contemporary capitalism without leaning on ‘totalising’ accounts of the social world (Back & Puwar, 2012: 8).

The other temporal element of the Live turn is future-facing, bringing sociology up-to-date with the problems of the social world today with its unprecedented creation of information and its myriad forms. In this view of innovation, Live experiments – *plays* even – with instruments unused to being considered within the realm of social research, but very much within the purview of those studied (Back, 2009; Marres, 2012). The complexity of the times we live in needs new methods to capture, understand, and represent them (Uprichard, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2019). These have included the use of big data (Marres, 2012), documentary software (Harris and Coleman, 2020), go-pro video cameras (Bates and Moles, 2020), and more. Beyond a simple(r) desire to match methods with milieu, the use of – mainly digital – technologies here is often more creative than straightforwardly representational. For example, in Dawn Lyon’s rhythm analysis of Billingsgate fish market her audio visual montage did not so much seek to ‘copy’ the market as data, but rather to grasp and re-present its rhythms (2016, 2019). In the context of indigenous knowledge, Willox et al use digital methods not in a purely instrumental way but because it allows them to capture and extend the indigenous method of story-telling within a digital setting (Cunsolo Willox, Harper and Edge, 2013).

In this article I engage with both themes of temporality and creative methodological tools by turning to slowness and *analogue* Live Methods. As such, I discuss my development of ‘slow methods’ (doodling, deliberative dwelling, ethnographic description) and build upon existing contributions within the Live Methods conversation. My argument has three strands: first, that Live Methods do not need to be digital, and that the embodied, attentive process of drawing can enrich understanding and analysis, particularly in spaces where the social world unfolds in uneven and ‘mundane’ ways (Holmes and Hall, 2020). Second, that playing with ‘slowness’ in research through intentional presence, embodied focus, and integrative reflection enriches the affect, atmosphere, and ambivalence of micro-happenings grasped by the researcher. Finally, that, contrary to the general assumption that ethnographers – and live methodologists – are necessarily required to always interact directly in the research field, the ‘shy researcher’ (Scott, Hinton-Smith, Härmä, & Broome, 2012: 724) can analyse the social world effectively through slow methods. I illustrate a way in which reflexivity can be fruitfully extended to thinking with the emotional and dramaturgical dimensions of the research process itself.

The article's discussion centres on an ethnographic case study of a joint-use public and academic library called The Hive<sup>1</sup>, and explores the contribution of these slow methods as an iterative data collection, analysis, and communication tool. The movement of slow methods is two-fold. Firstly, through dwelling, doodling, and description I argue that it becomes possible – even as a 'shy researcher' – to better *draw myself in* to the scene as it unfolds, live and in the field; doodling practices encouraged me to inhabit the uneven social space of the library. Secondly, this process of embodied attentiveness and the doodles it produced consequently enhances a capacity to be *drawn to see* the micro-happenings of the softly risk-laden space of the library – a space where private and public binaries quietly breach – and to then *re-present* them in both doodle and textual form. This representation is embodied and live, following Lynne Pettinger's view (2005: 348) that it is 'in the field that the process of creating an account of the social world begins.' Reflection here can encourage sociology that is faithful, without aiming for the impossible promise of being fully representational.

In the first half of the article I sketch out the terrain of Live Methods and allied literatures which relate to playing with time, shyness, and artful accounts of the ordinary. I use this ground-clearing work to point to the potential for bringing Live Methods into more deliberative conversation with the three allied strands of literature and practice implicated in slow methods: the non-digital approach of researcher-led drawing (Hurdley *et al.*, 2017; Heath *et al.*, 2018) 'ficto-critical' ethnographic writing (Stewart, 2008; Author 2020) and engagement with the emotional complexion of the fieldwork research encounter (Scott *et al.*, 2012). Combined, this approach turns more on *inhabiting* than *interacting* with the slow play of slow spaces.

In the second half I turn to my ethnographic case study. Firstly, I contextualise the library as a contested and ambivalent space, an informal place of learning and one with overlapping processes of relational publicness. The ambivalence is partly unique to the 'non-example' (Ellsworth, 2005: 9) or 'extreme case study' of The Hive – a library with an unusual institutional structure. However, it is also applicable to studies of locations where social life is 'ordinary' and unfolds in slow and uneven ways. While The Hive is singular in some ways, it is also emblematic of life in an 'everyday' city in many others. The second strand in this section involves me describing my own reflexive position within studies of libraries. Here, I speak to the 'mess' of social research in my own context: the desire to judge, find certainty, and deal with shyness in ethnographic encounters. Taking the two strands together: an uneven, everyday site (the library) with a reluctant researcher – albeit one with 'Shy Pride' (Scott *et al.*, 2012: 721) – the promise of 'slow', analogue methods is contextualised.

Having situated my research within the Live Methods literature and pulled out three dimensions in which slow methods can contribute, I turn to dwelling, doodling, and description: the slow methods themselves. I first describe the methodological disposition of slowness. I then select several scenes that speak to the issues raised in the first part of the paper and show how I have explored them in practice. Combined, I describe developing slow methods to be *drawn in* to the social world, and *drawn to see* and express its unfolding.

### Live methods: opportunities for engaging time, analogue methods, and shy reflexivity

Live Methods is a heterodox 'turn' loosely grouped around several dispositions. Firstly, it is attentive: Live methods engage the senses and the emotional attentiveness of the researcher in their vivid interaction the social (Gafijczuk, 2017). Secondly, the theoretical disposition of 'liveness' often moves into methods which are mobile (Lyon and Crow, 2012; O'Neill and Robert, 2020) collaborative (Tarr, Gonzalez-Polledo and Cornish, 2018) and reflective of their own partiality and constitution (Sheller, 2014; Harris and Coleman, 2020). Thirdly, the standard research process is considered 'simultaneous' and iterative (Back and Puwar, 2012, p. 7; Revsbæk and Tanggaard, 2015), with its communication in publications playing a key part in evoking the attentiveness obtained by the researcher in the mind of those reading.

Time, tempo and rhythm are among the central concerns of Live Methods. 'Encountering time' (Harris & Coleman, 2020: 605) and engaging with it through live sociological research recognises that time and space are constituted together and are productive, rather than providing a neutral backdrop. Temporality as 'lived time' (Ingold, 2011: 46; Sharma, 2014) calls to mind the myriad textures, rhythms and atmospheres that construct social life. The sociability of time and, connectedly, of rhythm - that concept of 'inherent ambiguity' (Crespi, 2014: 31) - is seen as vitally (in both senses of the word!) important to understanding the lived experiences of contemporary capitalism as it plays out for different bodies at different times. Questioning the status of time and space as merely 'given', linear, and separate of the researcher's body allows an exploration of the 'complex temporalities and territories of contemporary capitalism' (Lyon, 2019: 4).

Taking time seriously encourages thinking about emotion, affect, and atmosphere, and the task of sociological writing to re-present this. Exploring archive work within the 'live' sociological turn, Motamedi Fraser (2012: 98) defines writing as 'relations-with-words' and gently provokes sociologists to re-engage with the 'vitality' of words, as the most common material available to us. Outside sociology, the work of those anthropologists, literary critics, and sociologists involved in the 'Public Feelings Project' also engage in affective encounters multidimensionally, using writing as a methodological tool. In addition to Lauren Berlant (2011) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003, 2012), Kathleen

Stewart has written extensively on writing as method and describes how she uses ‘a creative, or ficto-critical form of writing/theorizing to approach [the field] as a live composition’ (2014: 551). In their recent experimental work, *The Hundreds*, Berlant and Stewart (2019: 46) – using a shared singular voice – describe the impossible promise of using language to portray the affective charge of any scene, while also making clear its value: ‘So, you’re writing. You make a pass at capturing something or tagging along. It’s too fast for you, it doesn’t cooperate, but you get something, backing up at the hint of precision, muscling your way in’. Acknowledging the limitation of text allows us to move beyond the crisis of representation and produce *faithful* – if personal – accounts.

Literature from outside the Live Methods group that engages with the dramaturgical and emotional complexion of ethnographic research is relevant to my development of slow methods. This work is insightful not only for self-confessed shy researchers – like me - but for any researcher engaged in interviews or ethnography. Scott et al’s work on ‘the reluctant researcher’ (2012: 716) argues that while research respondents have long been conceptualised – often reductively – as existing along a ‘spectrum of reluctance’, the subjectivity of the researcher is overlooked. Blackman (2007) also interrogates what he calls ‘hidden ethnography’ – the emotional exchanges that are deemed too controversial to be included in ethnographic accounts, but which are illuminative of the research process and findings. Sampurna Das (2020) argues that the ‘introvert’ in ethnographic research should be rehabilitated and that ‘curiosity with the social’ should not be assumed to lead to ‘ease’ with interviews. Das suggests the primary position of interviews in qualitative research should be demoted in recognition of the fact that many ‘introverts’ struggle with it. In my case, I argue below that doodling and reflexive engagement with shyness can heighten attentiveness through inhabiting space, if not straightforwardly interacting.

Live Methods’ relation with art and non-textual representation is the final area of literature pertinent to my engagement with analogue slow methods. Diverse in content and technique, live methodological strategies using ‘art’ have generally analysed art from the perspective of the participant, rather than the researcher. Tarr et al utilise painting in their study of pain, with the art being done by the research participants and via a professional artist facilitator (2018). Other people’s art is often employed as an aide to imaginative discussion in Les Back’s work (2007, 2012) with photography and collage also common (Lyon, 2019). Tolia-Kelly (2016: 899) collaborated with visual artists in her exploration of painful affect at museums and describes the value in these terms: ‘The art of art practice is to move us and jolt us out of our habits of seeing, encouraging us to ‘feel’ a new interpretation’. In keeping with other sentiments of the ‘live’ turn, art-fulness has the capacity to engage with the social world both in the field of study, and in its communication to a wider community.

Researcher-led art is less common even in these live fields, and analogue approaches like drawing is rarer still. Important recent work from Hurdley et al (2017) and Heath et al (2018), however, has engaged directly in both the relative absence of drawing – or “sketching” – in sociological research, and in the singular insights such methods contribute. For both groups, as for me, researcher-led drawing acts as a sensorial and analytical complement to more commonly used methods, with Heath et al emphasising that drawing encourages us to reflect on different types of data and our partiality as researchers. They go on to highlight how drawing focused attentions on overlooked spaces, objects and “infrastructures” (2018: 723) which gave rise to crucial insights. The practice itself is paramount: drawing is a noun and a verb, resulting in an ‘artefact’ (Miller, 2020: 344) but also constituting a period of embodied engagement that may be destabilising, provoking us to ‘see in a different way’ (Heath et al., 2018: 723). Drawing requires intention and focus, but also ‘flow’ and instinct. Jane Bennett (2020: ix) describes the whole-body experience of doodling in this way: ‘lines flow down arm, fingers, length of pencil, to exit at graphic tip and mingle with predecessors already on the page’. This immersive quality is as much about seeing as about capturing, and feeds directly into Live Methods’ concerns by centring embodied and affective attunement.

Common across these recent explorations of drawing in sociological research is insight into tensions felt around expertise and worthiness. Heath et al (2018:725) candidly explore feelings of nervousness about their ‘presumed lack of ability’ and refer to the initial reticence – the “dread of drawing” - experienced by students and academics alike when experimenting with lines of drawing rather than lines of text. Rachel Hurdley (2017: 749) acknowledges a similar fear, saying her early ‘[sketches] were not for public viewing. I could not draw’. As anthropologist Mike Taussig (2011: 33) says, our culture privileges writing over drawing, and is additionally impatient with the drawing ‘amateur’, despite the root word *amator* meaning ‘for the love of it’. The journey from anxiety to confidence – however fledgling - from engaging with drawing is poignant: Hurdley compares it to finding a voice, reflecting on having previously felt “mute”. Perhaps counter intuitively, the unsettling quality that drawing often evokes is, I think, key to its promise for Live Methods generally and methods for ‘shy researchers’ specifically. Drawing involves taking a gentle risk and rescinding control, something we instinctively do not like to do, but which can ultimately have a freeing and emboldening effect both emotionally and theoretically. If one of Live Methods’ aims is to resist a ‘totalising perspective’ (Back and Puwar, 2012: 8) while ‘learning to be affected’ (Gunaratnam, 2012) – by the scene and by our own dispositions towards it – the embodied reflexivity of amateur drawing is well placed as a contribution.

In this section I have foregrounded the features of the specifically ‘live’ literature that speak to its potential as a valuable disposition for engaging attentively with the micro life of social scenes. I also

indicated through reference to allied literatures on reflexivity in field work encounters and art-ful ethnography that new avenues could be forged in the development of live sociology that foreground 'analogue' methods and 'shy' researcher attentiveness. In the following section I introduce the site of the library and my personal engagement with it as context for the promise of slow methods. In thinking with the problem of attuning oneself – and one's physical body - to a complex, uneven social site and with the problem of engagement with it for a 'shy' researcher, I draw out examples below of what slow methods can offer.

### Playing with slow time in the case of the Library

I now turn to my own engagement with slow methods through discussion of my experience at The Hive library. My discussion is orientated towards the three main arguments of this article in relation to 'slow' methods: firstly, of showing the promise of doodling as a non-digital and embodied live method; secondly, of playing with slow-time in the field and in subsequent writing in order to ground, listen, and attend to the convivial and fractious elements of the social scene; and thirdly, to explore what an attentiveness to encounter which is not direct interaction – and thus is more accessible to a 'shy researcher' – does in terms of grasping the unfolding of social life in sites of uneven, slow activity. Overall, I illustrate how these slow methods allowed sociological insights to develop and therefore represent a worthwhile addition to 'live' sociology and methods.

Libraries have received relatively little attention in sociology, and are often overlooked as neutral, self-evident, or merely as sites through which to study other phenomena, unconnected to the material singularity of the space.<sup>2</sup> In fact, academic libraries have – ironically - been used as metaphors for what lively research isn't!<sup>3</sup> There is an ambivalence inherent to libraries. Though certainly institutions of drama and importance, libraries are also institutions of public life which contain the mundane, the everyday, routine and repetition. Similarly, though riven with classification and classifying infrastructures, the activities libraries – both public and academic - are home to activities which overflow simple descriptions of 'work', 'study', or 'leisure'. Therefore, in terms of fieldwork, slow for me meant a gradual, deliberate, unhurried, speculative approach to this uneven, ambivalent space. 'Slow' was a mode that allowed me to match the mood of the library and move with it.

Playing with slow approaches were also an antidote to the urge to judge. Beginning my fieldwork, I frequently found myself moved to promote or condemn the joint-use model of The Hive. This felt quick, sharp, loaded. My advocacy for libraries felt fierce and emotional, getting in the way of true attentiveness. I had left a librarian job to begin my PhD and was used to the subject being curiously denigrated. It was not nothing to be studying something that frequently prompted amused



responses, ranging from patronising intrigue ('an ethnography of a library? I didn't know you could study that...so lovely!!!') to ridicule ('A library? Who uses those?!'). It was hard to resist feeling defensive and wanting to state that projects like The Hive will save the idea of the library; either The Hive is good, or The Hive is bad. Part of the comfort of falling into simplistic evaluation comes with living in a society of five-star ratings (Causey, 2017: 20). More importantly, there is the difficulty of staying in the mess while still wanting to treat truth seriously. As Lambert (2018: 191) describes, working with 'the world's infinite complexity...calls on our powers of (sociological) imagination and our political wills to keep moving towards the brink rather than retreating to the clearer ground of (alleged) empirical assurance'. Engaging in an embodied 'slowness', including taking time to doodle what I saw and felt, was an organic way of taking stock in a field which felt at times overwhelming with value judgements.

The library is not always slow. Matching my own fieldwork practice to the rhythms of The Hive was a prefigurative reflection of my aim to understand the stories and everyday life of the space, as they sagged or swelled over the course of both the academic and calendar year. Dwelling, as described by Ingold (2011: 9) means 'literally to be embarked upon a movement along a way of life' and carries a concern with *being with* the world. Physical dwelling allowed dwelling in its other sense, as a rumination; I could dwell both on and in The Hive. This dwelling perspective therefore marries the slow and uneven life of the library with my 'shy researcher' disposition. Slow and low-intervention entry into the field was beneficial for making me hyper aware of atmospheric rhythms and their changes (Lyon, 2016). My disposition meant that at times I bristled as I observed punctuations to otherwise quiet days; the shout of frustration heard between the stacks, the feet dragging on the industrial carpet, the slap of a palm on the table. What I might have labelled 'over-thinking' was a value in reflecting on these incidences, on what it meant to approach people in public space, on what it meant for different workers with different pay and credentials to respond to strangers.

As my discussion so far has shown, the idea of 'slowness' has a produced, malleable quality. Beyond recognising that time 'emerges from and structures socio-political relations and power dynamics' (Harris & Coleman, 2020: 605), we can play with time further as researchers through methods. Kuschnir (2016: 121) refers to drawing in ethnography research as a good way to 'mess with' habituated ways of seeing. In my adoption of slowness and doodling, I extended this malleability, partly following Elizabeth Freeman's work on 'queer time'. She says, 'the point may be...to be interested in the tail end of things, willing to be bathed in the fading light of whatever has been declared useless' (Freeman, 2010: xiii). In addition to an obvious reading that libraries are institutions themselves that have been declared useless, the idea of being 'willing to be bathed in the fading light' has a suggestion of activity, choice, in the way that this time is absorbed and sensed.

Alongside evoking a dwelling disposition, the idea of queer time in Freeman's instance, and the 'slow' time in mine, make fluid the delineation between the researcher and the scene. I have a stake in the field I study, and choices around how to be with it.

### Slow methods in the Library

Now stepping within the library walls, I pull out instances where slow methods helped me to attune and attend to the life of the library. I have combined doodles with reworked reflective text to lead into discussions of the process and insights gained in this way. Combining doodle and texts serves to illustrate how doodling might complement more familiar methods in sociology (Heath et al., 2018: 718). It also reflects how they originally came about in the field. Although I also went on to re-work, expand, refine and integrate some into larger analytical 'dialectograms' (Miller, 2020), most of my doodles – and all included here - were drawn squashed amongst fieldwork observations, in the pen I had just been writing with, often annotated. Visually, my doodles are cartoonish, instinctive and expressive rather than representative.

I chose the term 'doodling' rather than drawing, partly as a semi-conscious snub at my notebook scribbles – as compared with 'art'. But more importantly the term speaks to the liminal analytical space doodles held for me. As Jane Bennett (2020: x) recently wrote, 'doodling helps people to think, to process ideas, concepts, tones, and figures of speech'. Below, I illustrate how a slow physical and sensorial disposition enriched my representation of the library and encouraged embodied reflexivity without direct interaction.

#### 1. Doodling to enhance attentiveness: The Boundary Space



FIGURE 1

*'Drama is default: 'Oi, where the FOCK'S Kingy? Well I ain't fuckin' waitin'', a man shouts from outside The Hive's double door. He obviously then waits, what else is he going to do? I watched a couple argue in almost boring repetition for half an hour.*

*One walking away, then walking back, the other walking away then walking back, all around The Hive, threatening to go in, but not managing it. Swear words often get given emphasis. Passions are so strongly and constantly felt, every speech is hard, brittle, almost difficult to get out. But melding with this passion and drama, the constant play of hardness, hard game, is the irony of it all playing out as a congregation outside a library. Men strut to the door of The Hive, hips pushed forward, hands in pockets, then back away and discuss. Power play with security guards; entrance/escape/barrier (Reflection)*

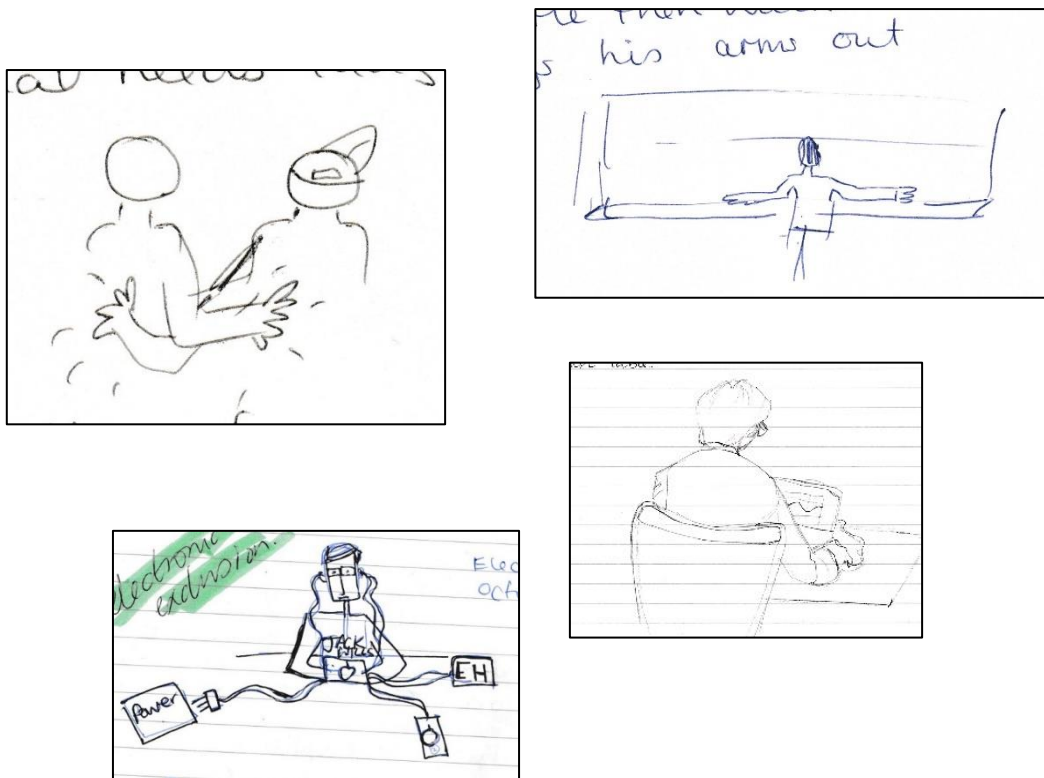
The first way I approached doodling as both a methodological and analytical process of ‘enhanced seeing’ (Causey, 2017: 13) was to use it as a grounding and stabilising method when faced with the complexity of the space. Sitting outside the building – on a small wall some ten metres away from the entrance - allowed me to track the partial permeability of the library. I called it the ‘boundary space’ to highlight how different people were ‘held’ in some form of either belonging or alienation. On one side of my field notebook, I swiftly and instinctively drew the entrance from my vantage point to the side of the action (Figure 1). By spreading urgent expletives across the ground, with The Hive remaining a blank, unexplored entity, I sought to capture how, when these interruptions happened, they spread out and seemed to dominate the atmosphere. The elevated voices display a shallow form of power; a temporary, weakly held ownership of the space. People coming around the corners of the building on either side must negotiate this, sometimes seeming to physically shrink towards the sides of the building before sliding through its entrance – almost as an escape.

Engaging with who did not enter the library, as well as who did, and how, was vital to developing an understanding of the persistent symbolic lines of classification in the library. It was in this process, of drawing the scene and acknowledging my initial absence from it – watching from afar - that my attentiveness grew, and that the role of this outside space as a boundary of belonging struck me as significant. Seeking through the pen, gripped over several minutes and moving in connection with my eyes, ears, processing thoughts (and blood pressure!) to grasp and convey the atmospheric edginess of the space was a slow and embodied process. I inhabit the scene and dwell *with* it.

## 2. Doodling to reflect on encounters: Character doodles

Building on the previous vignette’s ‘outsider’ position, the second scene speaks to doodling with slow methods’ capacity to engage directly with the emotional dramaturgy of fieldwork. As well as capturing an impression of the scene, these ‘character doodles’ also work at an analytical level. The analysis is two-fold: both in-the-moment, as I inhabit the scene through doodling, and on subsequent reflection.

My approach here was born partly of necessity. The public library is a meeting place for everyday austerity (Hitchen, 2019: 20) and I initially felt flooded and an embodied sadness at times, observing the struggles encountered by many who shared the space. I wrote in my research diary after one month of fieldwork that I had ‘got on the train already. Can’t stay watching the regulars on okcupid, desperate scrolling, usual guy asleep by the lift’. I felt strongly affected by witnessing and engaging with so many people whose lives appeared challenging. I also came to think that I could not be alone, that the shyness or sadness I felt approaching strangers was not wholly mine but could be read as an underacknowledged reality for many researchers and many people. This shyness is not necessarily something to be overcome, but to be acknowledged and engaged with as a sociological, not private, experience of belonging in public space.



**FIGURE 2**

Here, as a way to engage with my reactions without seeking to deny or eliminate them, I employed doodles to allow myself to be attentive to details, affects, and moments of what I call ‘ordinary

empathy’ – a theoretical portmanteau of Kathleen Stewart’s ‘ordinary affect’ (2007) and Carolyn Pedwell’s work on relational empathy (2012). Reflecting on my doodles, I was drawn to see differently. While possible to ‘read’ some encounters as sad, I came to understand that such judgements revealed a distance, a gap, between myself and the scenes. These were generated by perceived difference, sensory overload, and a head full of facts and figures related to austerity and libraries. By doodling characters to capture scenes – like the pair slapping each other’s backs in companionship, or the old man sighing as he observed the cityscape outside the window he leant against (Figure 2) – I could then reflect on my doodling choices and appreciate the many ways their stories could be told. Through doodling I learned to engage with the moment I found myself in, rather than creating stories about how these circumstances had come about. Again, this was contemplative, and involved, even if it was not directly interactional.



Figure 3

Character doodles also helped operationalise the key themes and concepts of my research as they emerged. Here, my approach follows Hall et al.’s belief that drawing helps to ‘try things out, to test a hunch, to expand or eliminate a hypothesis’ (Hall et al., 2015: 70). As with the ‘boundary space’ outside the library, classification and classificatory practices became key concepts in my ethnography. While discussion of classificatory practices between the two main communities using The Hive (University students and the general public) and the strategies used to address them are beyond the scope of this article, I briefly describe them now to elucidate on how I used doodling to work through the concept.

On many occasions I encountered students who were physically and sonically dominating and who expressed not wanting to share ‘their’ library with the general public. Language was entitled, often reminiscent of the workplace, or the gym, with friends telling each other they were ‘putting a shift in’ or ‘going back to the grind’. The library was a place where they could be *seen* to be working

overtime, to punctuate their study, and to see their friends. In figure 3 I substantially exaggerated and accentuated features to evoke this impression of the library's function for students.

Unintentional, simplistic judgements were easy to make when observing inconsiderate behaviour by people with – on one level – degrees of privilege compared to many members of the non-university going public. But in doodling those emotions in cartoonish ways, and integrating my reflections with related literature and data, I slowed into a more balanced relationship with them – one of connection and even affection. I reflected on the fact that I too was doing classificatory work, as a student, researcher, member of the public, former-librarian. I came to appreciate how the power of the student voice was often shallow; the anxiety and bluster, high. It was the students who – in often more pronounced ways than other library users – had confused presents and precarious futures. Moments of ordinary empathy highlighted the space more frequently than moments of friction, only more quietly, more slowly.

This style of doodling risks being unfair. Drawing on Max Weber's theory of ideal types, Andrew Causey calls his version of these drawings 'types', and freely admits them to be 'stereotypes' which pull together details from a great number of people into one image (2017: 50). Especially since I did not involve anyone I was observing in the creation of the doodles, there is an extent to which I am guilty of caricaturing. However, I hope to have illustrated that the process of these doodles was more important than the result. Paradoxically, they worked *against* caricaturing and towards a reflexive telling of the library's many stories.

### 3. Slow methods for grasping ordinary empathy in the library's SunSeat

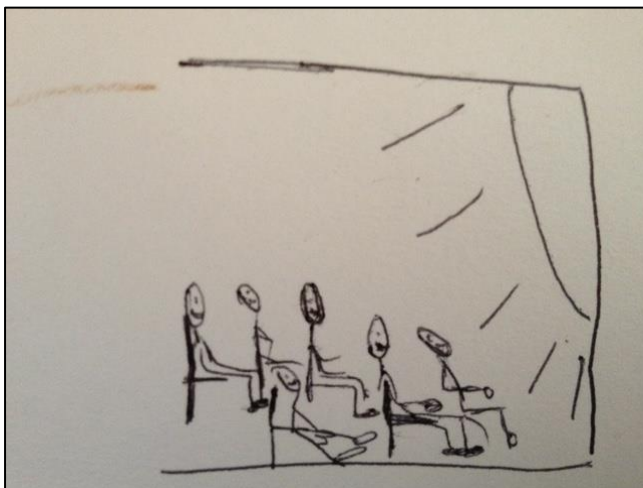


FIGURE 4

The final doodle-reflection excerpt is the 'loosest', and the closest to what Stewart calls 'creative non-fictional, or ficto-critical' (Stewart, 2014: 55) in her own work. Like her, this allows me to 'slow

down and shrink' analysis, and create a sense of the atmospheres and shared feelings that accompanied the scene. I hope to show in my reflection of the sunseat the way in which playing with slowness operates across time and method, both at the collection and communication stage of the ethnographic process.

### The Sunseat

*I begin coming to a seating area on the third floor of the library every lunch time quite early in my fieldwork. The space acts as a bridging place: between the fiction and non-fiction sequence, inside and outside, study and leisure, university and public, belonging and not belonging. In this bridging, the 'sunseat' optimises the messy integration of systems of knowledge and social life brought about in The Hive. Few encounters bubble into meetings of huge note, but bodies and feelings are immersed and contingent; they invite and refuse one another in sometimes poignant ways.*

*A floor to ceiling window of about ten metres width provides a soft and permeable gate between the library and the scene beyond, and I begin to call the area the 'sunseat' in shorthand because of the relationship people drawn to this area have towards this window. I didn't call it the 'sunseat' because the sun is blazing in and dominating the scene – obviously that's rare. But the area became the 'sunseat' to me because of the softly drawing effect it has on the people who arrive and sometimes join each other there, physically turning their bodies, the incline of their faces, towards a soft and undominating light.*

*When I doodle the area, I accentuate the processes: bodies homogenise into stick men uniformly smiling to the sun, postures are easy, slouchy, the sun itself is large and has come within the building. The simplicity of the doodle reflects the simplicity of the pleasure found in the scene, held between the books inside and the hills beyond.*

*The 'sunseat's' inbetweenness extends to its relationship with the city of Worcester. It acts as a soft gateway between inside and outside and captures motion and contrast in its view. The view and its fluency has a contagious quality and holds people, like a prop to their comfort.*

*In the seated area itself the gathered individuals and groups often pick up and repurpose the furniture to bring their own sense of comfort when possible, angling the seat towards the window. People bring in their own items – laptops, books, phones - and mix them with the library's. They take up temporary ownership of the space and make themselves comfortable – at home?*

*I see an old lady who visits the space on her mobility scooter and brings her lunch – old margarine tubs filled with sandwiches and yoghurt pots with grapes. She scoots in, unpacks in front of the window, eats, and scoots off again. We share occasional smiles, but she's on a mission, daily. There's a sense both of routine and of occasion, something again in-between. Students often break from the more traditionally disciplined and disciplining spaces of the library to join the sunseat for lunch, before returning to their desks. For them this is a break, for others the 'sunseat' is the whole event.*

*The space of the 'sunseat' and its bridging position encourages encounters between strangers and makes private moments feel shared for many who are open to them. It is in this space that striking up ethnographic interviews often feels effortless. Elsewhere, even elsewhere in the unusual public library, tiny attempts at verbal or even non-verbal connection with strangers is so 'outside' that it can feel formidable. The 'sunseat' isn't immune to this risk, but there's somehow a tacit agreement, encouraged by many, shared, tiny decisions that conversation between strangers is (more, usually) welcome here.*

Here, in figure 4 I grasped time and affect. Rather than being literally accurate, drawing – with its imperfections and exaggerations – conveyed the results of slow and deliberate engagement with the space. Drawing lives - live - in this way provided an atmospheric touch point for me to engage with repeatedly. This area of the library lent itself to thinking across the Live Methods gambit, with mobilities, affect, and social time unfolding in front of me as I inhabited it. Almost ironically, it was also in this space, and in this modality of slow methods, that interacting more directly with strangers in public space finally felt something like comfortable. As well as acknowledging the excellent architectural design which encouraged these encounters, perhaps we can infer from this that slowing down and attending to the micro happenings of the social world in an embodied way is a beneficial practice for cultivating ordinary empathy.

## Conclusion

Live Methods has invigorated sociology since it emerged almost a decade ago by calling for attentiveness, playfulness and suppleness in the practice and process of social research. Live Methods' integration of creative approaches to time, tempo and rhythm with creative approaches to engagement and representation greatly enriched my ethnographic interaction with the Hive library. Hoping to engage directly with this literature and be faithful to its ongoing adaptations and provocations, it also encouraged me to play further with the boundaries of Live Methods by bringing some of these Live Methods dispositions into closer conversation with two other related literatures: those engaged in analogue approaches and those concerned with the research encounter from the



perspective of the shy researcher. By way of conclusion I will revisit the three strands of argument in this article in favour of slow methods through reference to the stories of the library presented.

In line with Live Methods' calls to "real-time" investigation (Back and Puwar, 2012, p. 8), spaces of mundane and uneven unfolding, like libraries, benefit from creative analogue approaches. Without seeking to replace the digital in live research, the work of others engaged in sociological drawings (Hall, King and Finlay, 2015; Hurdley *et al.*, 2017; Heath *et al.*, 2018) as well as my own highlight the singular advantages of research-led drawing in several key ways: drawing allowed me to be engaged in the social life of the library in a directly embodied, contemplative, and creative way. A curiously well known *and* deleted space in public life, the library requires investigation that inhabits its singularity and evolving functions. Dwelling on and in The Hive through doodling encouraged a compositional, slow and reflective perspective that drew me towards the edges, boundaries, and outside-spaces of the library that could so easily have been overlooked or taken 'as read'. Beyond matching methods with milieu, this malleable slowness shaped what was possible to grasp and represent faithfully. Understanding and ingratiating myself in this quietly contested space, moving with and through its slow rhythms, laden both with 'mundane' austerity and the uplift of empathetic encounter required a suppleness towards methods which garnered specific insights.

Beyond this particularly embodied quality of *analogue* slow methods, I also argue that playing with slowness –understood as creative, malleable, and reflective - enriched insight. Doodling supplemented the other features of slow methods (dwelling, ethnographic description) by calling on in-the-moment and subsequent analysis and soft self-critique, as well as producing an experience and an artefact which spoke directly to the emotion of the encounter that had given rise to it. This was particularly beneficial when thinking about the subtle, affective microhappenings of the library and in particular spaces like 'the sunseat'. Very low intervention engagement with everyday spaces with surprisingly profound atmospheres, the blurring of the private and the public, and the everyday intimacies public space gave me a reflective stake in both grasping and communicating emotion. While holding on to the singularity of the library, other overlooked public spaces where the social world unfolds in uneven and mundane ways would also benefit from these approaches.

Finally, slow methods offer a particular insight regarding shy research, for those who identify as 'shy researchers' and those who don't. I argue that slow methods allow an exploration into the dramaturgical complexion of research encounters without denying or collapsing the emotionality of the researcher or jeopardising the empirical analysis. In this sense, the reflexive imperative of Live Methods bridges with the empirical imperative. My attention towards the soft emotional complexity of the library space was mobile and born in these live relations – of myself to the field, and in my

ongoing reflection of it. The diverse constancy of sometimes challenging social processes in the library created a wall of possible data but one that felt uneven and overwhelming when approached traditionally through direct interaction, especially as a shy person. Moving with, rather than against, this disposition, allowed valuable insights to be made about the sociological publicness of private feelings, which a forced direct interactional approach might have artificially flattened.

In doing this bridging work with reference to my own shy engagement in the ultimate shy space – the library – I hope to have illustrated fruitful avenues for further live methods research which more closely considers the complementarity of analogue methods to digital ones.

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<sup>1</sup> The Hive is a PFI funded integrated library which houses the City of Worcester public library and the University of Worcester's academic library. It opened in 2012 and has fully integrated public/academic library staff and library collections.

<sup>2</sup> Recent excellent public library based ethnographies by Esther Hitchin (2019) and Katherine Robinson (2020) show increasing interest in the spaces.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Art of Listening* (2007), Les Back implores his students to leave the library and head out to the real world, saying, that among the 'musty shelves' and 'pages that are yellowed by time' we will 'not find the answers to the questions we want to ask' (p175).

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